

12 Days of Christmas

Festive Survival Guide
From Our Mental Health Elf, Lauren



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Day 1: Comfort and Joy

Christmas is commonly associated with an excess of food, alcohol and 'treats' which can trigger some disordered thoughts around eating, especially if you have had problems with food or body image in the past.

Lauren: "Challenge the black-and-white thinking and allow some flexibility in your routine so you can enjoy some Christmas pudding, but you don't have to go overboard and have two helpings. Try and keep some exercise or healthy routines in place, but don't panic if you can't do it every day as you will get back to your usual routines once Christmas is over."



Day 2: It's The Most Wonderful Time Of The Year...right?

If you struggle with managing your inner people-pleasing side, Christmas can be a minefield of social obligations and expectations from others. We may find ourselves twisting into difficult positions which take away from the fact we are meant to be enjoying ourselves.

Lauren: "It is actually a good problem to have - everyone wants to spend time with us! Practice saying 'no' to some of the lesser important social events or demands in your calendar, which will build your confidence in saying no to other events. It is impossible to please everyone, and sometimes impossible to please anyone! So perhaps trying to please yourself is the best outcome."



Day 3: 'Tis the Season To Be Jolly

Christmas can be a very difficult time for those with a mental health condition, particularly as access to services is limited and support systems are often busy and can even be unavailable. Please know that it is ok to not feel jolly.

Lauren: "If you have a mental health problem, writing down a plan on how you will manage it and knowing who you can contact, can help you feel supported over the festive period. Check with the people you might want to call on and ask about their availability. Make sure you know what services are open and when."



Day 4: I Won't Ask For Much This Christmas

Being away from loved ones at Christmas can be hard, especially when other people are making plans with theirs. This can make physical distance from our loved ones seem more immense and contribute to feelings of loneliness and sadness.

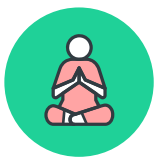
Lauren: “Make fun plans and spend Christmas time doing something different. It is normal to feel sad at being so far away from family and friends but having new and different experiences will help you build up positive memories and also distract you from feeling left out.”



Day 5: Keep Calm and Jingle All The Way

Families can be tricky at the best of times, and the pressure of Christmas can exacerbate family tensions and be stressful for families with existing conflicts or difficulties.

Lauren: “Make sure you book some time in for yourself to rebalance and breathe. It is important to take time out and have a moment (or two) to recalibrate. Try going for a walk, cycle or run, or a coffee on your own at a local cafe, or even offering to do the groceries. Self-care and time will be your buffer here.”



Day 6: All Is Calm, All Is Bright

For everyone, Christmas time changes our routines and usual ways of doing things. It may be working less or not at all, reducing business or not having our usual outlets like the gym or friends available. It can feel difficult and uncomfortable to be out of our comfort zone.

Lauren: “Instead of looking at it like a challenge, know this is a very short time and you will soon be back to normal. Try and be mindful and take opportunities that are not normally available such as slowing down, noticing things around you and sitting with (and tolerating) the unexpected.”



Day 7: Social Media Scrooge

Christmas is another social media frenzy opportunity and people may post relentlessly throughout the festive period. It is therefore easy to fall into the trap of comparing yourself to others and you may feel like you come up short, which brings up feelings of inadequacy and disappointment.

Lauren: “If you find you are continuously comparing yourself to others, Christmas is no different and can potentially be worse for your mental health. It is strongly recommended to have a break from social media – challenge yourself to have a couple of days present in the moment and have a digital switch off - this could be the biggest gift to yourself.”



Day 8: It's Beginning to Cost A Lot Like Christmas

Christmas is looming and times are tough for, well most people. The pressure to spend money, buy the shiniest gift, the newest toys and the biggest Christmas dinner is immense and can cause anxiety and financial stress.

Lauren: “Set a budget early and speak to your immediate family so they have reasonable expectations. Most people are feeling the financial pressures this year and will understand the need to do things differently. Use it as an opportunity to be more creative, and try a consumer-free Christmas.”



Day 9: All I Want For Christmas Is You

The festive period can be particularly challenging for those who have lost loved ones. Christmas traditions, events and periods of reflection may highlight loss further and enhance the feelings of grief experienced.

Lauren: “Grief is normal and expected. Ensure that you save some time on Christmas day to remember your loved one(s), whether individually or as a family. Acknowledging you are missing that person, allows you to move on with your day and experience joy. Make sure you then move to a different activity so you can switch from sadness to being present at Christmas.”



Day 10: And So This Is Christmas...

Many people experience loneliness at Christmas, those without family or friends, or at a distance, or those who are in care or living alone.

Lauren: “Be proactive - if you know of people around you who may be alone, make an effort to call in on them and wish them a good Christmas. If you are on your own, look up what is going on in your community as there are always fun and usually free events to attend or volunteer for a charity.”



Day 11: Smells Like Christmas Spirit

Alcohol is often part of Christmas celebrations and this can be difficult for people who have trouble regulating their alcohol intake or are prone to binge drinking.

Lauren: “If you know that you have a difficult time around alcohol, make sure you have some alcohol-free events scheduled. You could even try an alcohol-free Christmas! Book some non-alcohol-related activities, who would say no to a family hike?! The most important thing is to plan these events or activities so there is a higher likelihood of doing them.”



Day 12: Believe in Your Elf

If you spend time with people you may not have seen all year, and who may be unaware of recent difficulties, you might feel under pressure to pretend you are OK.

Lauren: “No one expects you to be OK all the time, and it can be a relief not to have to pretend. Be honest with yourself and others about how you are feeling and what support you need, build in some self-care time, and it will take one pressure off by not having to put a front on.”